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June 8, 1983

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SUBJECT: CPPG Analysis of Potential for Syrian-Israeli  
Conflict and U.S. Options

The attached draft has been revised to take into account views expressed at the CPPG meeting on June 6. It is intended to be an illustrative summary of actions the U.S. would take in response to three possible scenarios of Syrian-Israeli conflict. Comments should be directed to Ed Abington (632-3672) by COB Thursday, June 9.

*Coray*  
Charles Hill  
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

As stated

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POTENTIAL FOR SYRIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT AND  
U.S. RESPONSES TO VARIOUS ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIOS

Recent Syrian military activity and Israeli responses have heightened the potential for conflict between Israel and Syria. The battlefield of such a conflict most likely would initially be in Lebanon, but the hostilities could rapidly spread into Syria, and possibly, to Israel.

The following illustrative summary analysis draws from a more extensive examination of the potential for a Syrian-Israeli conflict done by the Crises Pre-Planning Group (CPPG). (The CPPG paper is found at the attached tab). This analysis examines three of ten possible scenarios -- ranging from low-level hostility to all-out Syrian-Israeli war -- postulated by the CPPG and explains how the U.S. might deal with the Soviets, Syrians and Israelis under these three scenarios. The focus regarding U.S. responses is on those specific actions about which the U.S. may need to make decisions immediately.

SCENARIO I: PLO infiltration and/or terrorist attacks on IDF forces in Lebanon aimed at a war of attrition, prompting Israeli response ranging from limited attacks on specific PLO installations to a full-scale strike on Syrian forces in Lebanon.

Dealing with the Soviets

As the PLO increasingly appears to be falling under the control of Syria (and by proxy the Soviet Union), we could expect that the Soviets, in pursuit of their objective of blocking implementation of the Lebanon-Israeli agreement, will have some input into any decision to initiate PLO attacks on Israeli forces in Lebanon. Such attacks could be used to maintain a low-level war of attrition against Israeli forces and serve the Soviet objective by ensuring continuation of tension in Lebanon.

If we learn that a calculated war of attrition has begun, we should immediately send a high level message to the Soviets urging restraint, cautioning them of the dangers of miscalculation which could lead to an uncontrollable escalation of hostilities, and indicating the need for an immediate PLO

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standdown. We should urge our allies to make similar demarches to the Soviets urging restraint. We also will want to consider a tough public statement expressing our concern about heightened tension in the region. This statement would implicate the Soviets as responsible for the escalation and tension but stop short of making public threats toward the Soviets. We would carefully want to consider the pros and cons before taking any moves to bring this matter before the UN Security Council given anti-Israeli sentiment in the UN. At the same time, realizing our military options on this scenario are limited, we should consider:

- putting U.S. MNF forces in Beirut on alert while closely coordinating with the MNF contingents of other countries;

- undertaking precautionary evacuation plans to ensure the safety of USG personnel and U.S. citizens in Lebanon and to signal the seriousness with which we take the rising tensions;

If hostilities escalate further to extensive ground combat, we may have to consider additional military options to warn the Soviets, including:

- reinforcing the Sixth Fleet, including the Eisenhower task force;

- upgrading DEFCON in the region.

#### Dealing with the Syrian

We should make it clear that we hold the Syrians responsible for any actions against Israeli forces -- whether they are initiated by Syrian or PLO troops -- which emanate from Syrian controlled territory in Lebanon.

We should warn the Syrians of the dangers they will incur if they continue on this course. In stimulating our allies and friends -- particularly those in the region -- to urge restraint on Syria, we should stress our view that Syria should be treated as an independent entity. On the military front, there is little we should do in response to the hostilities under this scenario if such hostilities remain contained at a low level. After hostilities escalate, any military moves we take will be done more to impress the Soviet Union against escalation than to influence the situation on the battlefield as Israel has the military capability to overwhelm Syria.

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Dealing with the Israelis

Our main focus vis-a-vis Israel should be to stress the need to prevent a dangerous escalation in the hostilities. We will want to be in close consultation with the Israelis but avoid taking steps which give the impression to Israel (or, for that matter, to our friends in the Arab world) that we are giving Israel a "green light" to undertake a response disproportionate to the original provocation. At the same time, while we should expect some proportionate Israeli response (e.g., aerial attacks against those targets which provoke the hostilities), our efforts with the Israelis should stress bringing a rapid conclusion to any hostility before it escalates beyond the Bekaa Valley. On the military side, our response should be limited to those measures which provide moral support and convey the proper signal to the Soviets, as Israel will be in little need of physical support.

If the Israelis choose to respond to limited PLO attacks with a full-scale strike on Syrian air and ground forces in Lebanon, our efforts with Israel should focus on the need for restraint. We should recognize that once the fighting escalates to this level, U.S. interests would be served by the most rapid possible Israeli victory in hostilities limited to Lebanon.

SCENARIO II: Israeli/Syrian air clashes over Lebanon or Syrian firing of surface-to-air missiles at Israeli aircraft from Lebanon.

The May 25 attack by Syrian aircraft on Israeli reconnaissance/patrol aircraft over the Bekaa Valley demonstrates that this scenario is a real possibility.

Dealing with the Soviets

On the diplomatic front, we should deliver a demarche to the Soviets, but not explicitly accuse them of stimulating the Syrian attack. Rather, our message should emphasize the need for restraint on all sides and the consequences if such restraint is not forthcoming. Our message should take into account that the Soviets probably do not retain operational control over either Syrian aircraft or missiles in Lebanon as they do over the SA-5 missiles in Syria. We should also bear

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in mind that under certain conditions U.S. military moves might be viewed by the Soviets as a prelude to an Israeli attack and might contribute to the escalation we wish to prevent.

Dealing with the Syrians

We should approach Syria directly and forcefully to demand it cease such provocative actions. In addition to delivering a demarche to President Assad, Ambassador Paganelli should be instructed to broaden his circle of high-level interlocutors in Damascus beyond Assad, to include Assad's brother and others. Without appearing to make any threats on behalf of Israel, Paganelli would warn the Syrians of the likely consequences of their attack on Israeli aircraft. Since it is quite likely the Israelis will have responded before we have an opportunity to demarche Syria, Paganelli's message should caution against Syrian actions which will result in a spiralling of hostility. We should accompany these private diplomatic approaches with strong public statements condemning the Syrian attack and calling for restraint by all sides. We would not recommend any specific U.S. military moves in response to this level of Israeli-Syrian clashes.

Dealing with the Israelis

In all likelihood, Israeli would have responded to a Syrian attack on its aircraft well before we have had an opportunity to react. Therefore, our first opportunity to react will actually be a U.S. response to a Syrian provocation and Israeli retaliation. If the Israeli response is limited to eliminating the source of provocation (e.g., knocking out the SAM site from which the missile was fired or shooting down Syrian aircraft involved in the initial attack), we should urge the Israelis to go no further and undertake diplomatic actions which explain that Israel was only acting in self-defense.

If the Israeli response to the initial attack is disproportionate, we should urge restraint on Israel and distance ourselves somewhat from this Israeli retaliation. This distancing would best be accomplished by subtle public and private messages.

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SCENARIO III: Israeli-Syrian ground and air hostilities between current forces spread beyond Lebanon's borders and include Israeli strikes on SAM sites within Syria and/or Soviet/Syrian SA-5 strikes against Israeli aircraft over Israeli territory.

Under this scenario, hostilities have escalated into an all-out war between Syria and Israel. Israel has already attacked Soviet-manned SA-5 sites, resulting in significant Soviet casualties and Israeli losses. We should be ready to execute plans to evacuate U.S. Government personnel and U.S. citizens in Lebanon and Syria. Similarly, we should be prepared, if necessary, to evacuate our MNF contingent.

#### Dealing with the Soviets

In the event of an all-out Syrian-Israeli war, we should consider a strong demarche at the highest level -- perhaps including use of the "hot line" -- to urge restraint on the Soviets. While the Soviets will not have the capability to intervene in time to prevent a probable Israeli victory, they may undertake military moves such as mobilization of forces, increasing their alert status, and strengthening their naval forces in the area. For our part, we should be prepared to consider the following military moves:

- reinforce the Sixth Fleet and position the Eisenhower Task Force off the coast of Lebanon;
- upgrade DEFCON worldwide;
- if the Soviets mobilize, undertake partial mobilization of U.S. forces;
- provide air cover for resupply flights to Israel.

At this level of escalation, our focus should be on working with the Soviets to end the hostilities. Our interests would be best served if this happened after the Israeli forces had proved preponderant.

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Dealing with the Syrians

At this stage of hostilities, the U.S. -- in concert with its allies -- should urge restraint on Syria and warn of the consequences of a continuation of hostilities. Our major diplomatic efforts, however, should be through those moderate Arab countries (particularly the Saudis) which may have greater influence in Damascus. We should be prepared to deal with Arab initiatives in the U.N. to condemn Israel, but if past practices are any example, we will have to rely on mechanisms outside the U.N. to resolve this conflict. In this respect, we may have to be prepared to dispatch a special envoy to the region to seek peace. Personal messages from the President to Assad will also be necessary.

Dealing with the Israelis

Our posture toward Israel should parallel the support we gave Israel in 1973, including strong diplomatic support for Israel and resupply of military equipment as needed. This military resupply effort should have sufficient visibility to demonstrate our moral backing of Israel. However, we should bear in mind that the more visible our support to Israel, the more lasting will be the meritable Arab backlash. In our public messages, we should focus on the particular danger of this conflict due to the Soviet dimension.

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